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ABSTRACT

"Communication workshop" refers to the public-service oriented course that civic organizations, services, and clubs and political groups often request from professional educators. Ethical communication demonstrates a desire for the good of all those involved in the communication process, rather than just the personal gain of the speaker or the good of the listener. One possible method of teaching ethics within the constraints of the workshop requires placing ethics and communication in a broader perspective: instead of separating ethics from communicaton theory, the instructor may merge the two by suggesting that ethical communication achieves more significant goals than audience effect. Ethical communication may then be viewed as a means of maintaining a healthy society, guaranteeing free speech, and enhancing political pluralism, among other societal goals. Within a personal code of communication ethics, workshop instructors should (1) fully and honestly disclose academic qualifications to participants; (2) specify services, objectives, and the end products of the seminar; (3) cite sources of any work other than their own, never claiming any work other than their own; (4) act in ways consistent with their professional conscience; (5) view the workshop as an opportunity to focus on the participants' needs; (6) reflect understanding and application of speech communication theory; (7) maintain a working understanding of advances in their area of expertise; and (8) request and conduct participant evaluations of the instructors' workshop performance. (HTH)

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Sixty Minutes to Better Communication: Ethical Issues Within the Communication Workshop

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"Sixty Minutes to Better Communication:
Ethical Issues Within the Communication Workshop"

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Paper presented to the
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Ten years ago Robert Jeffrey admonished members of the Speech Communication Association for failing to support the "one thread that binds together the association--a dedication to free and responsible speech."[1] Although speaking from a Watergate-induced perspective, Jeffrey broached a persistent question among speech communication educators: should we--and if so, how should we--teach ethics in the communication course? The question endures because, as Richard Johannesen notes, "Potential ethical issues inhere in any human communication transaction."[2] This inherent relationship suggests that all facets of communication instruction, including non-traditional forms, require ethical attention. This paper examines one such form of instruction, the communication workshop, and its implicit assumptions, in light of ethical considerations.

"Communication workshop" refers to the public-service oriented course that civic organizations, service clubs, and political groups often request from professional educators, and for which the instructors are seldom monetarily compensated. It is generally a short-term training and development program directed toward a specific group and dealing with a specific topic. This essay will focus on the communication workshop which emphasizes public speaking skills, although the conclusions are certainly applicable to other types of communication workshops.

Contrasting the communication workshop with typical classroom instruction will help to illustrate the unique properties of the workshop experience. We hope to demonstrate that although the forms of the workshop and the classroom differ, the content and fundamental goals do not. The major difference between

them is that certain key characteristics of the workshop constrain the ways in which the teacher may achieve his/her teaching goals. This paper seeks to examine these constraints and to suggest ways to integrate ethical concerns within the workshop.

The public's desire in recent years for self-improvement has fueled the opportunity to offer workshops. Waldo Braden observes, "The skilled persuader and his teacher are more in demand today than ever before."[3] Viewing the pragmatic skills that communication education offers, Americans seem ready and willing to embrace the communication workshop, which is generally offered by members of higher education. Universities apparently desire greater connection with the public and are striving to eliminate the lingering vestiges of the ivory tower. Instructors in state-supported institutions have become especially active in demonstrating the benefits that higher education can provide outside the classroom. Although public service requirements for tenure and promotion are often fulfilled by service to the academic discipline, it is clear that the communication workshop offers a useful and popular service to the community. Thus, we witness more of our colleagues willingly taking their skills to the public. As a result, universities and colleges are beginning to grapple with the reward structure for community service, illustrated by the example of one major university which recently passed a resolution calling for "greater incentives and rewards for high quality faculty participation as resource persons in university-sponsored continuing education and public service activities."[4] The workshop and the continuing education course benefit the institution by generating goodwill toward the institution and by attracting non-traditional students to the campus. Moreover, as The Journal of Higher Education reports, public service teaching provides numerous pedagogical rewards to the college teacher, including the "development of new instructional approaches that may also benefit on-campus teaching."[5]

Before discussing workshop constraints, let us examine briefly the issue of "ethical communication" and its place in a teacher's ethical code. If the general goal of education is to facilitate a search for "truth" concerning various social and scientific aspects of our world and cultures, then educators must pay particular attention to the truth-seeking method used--which is often rhetoric, or communication. We cannot learn except through communication, and thus we should be very conscious of its use. This caveat especially applies to short-term, one-time only workshop instructors. Many participants have this as their only contact with the speech field, and we should teach our craft with special care to those who wish to utilize specific skills. Jeffrey and others claim that we should be dedicated to "free and responsible speech," so we must pay particular attention to the contacts we have with people who seek instruction from us. Karl Wallace suggests that "there are ethical standards which should control any situation in which speaker and writer endeavor to inform and influence others." He explains that ethical rhetoric "respects the means more than the end," demonstrates a "profound faith in equality of opportunity," includes a "belief in [restrained and responsible] freedom," and assumes that "every person is capable of understanding the nature of democracy."[6]

Wallace, like many others, avoids the almost impossible task of defining "ethics," but rather is more concerned with the places where ethics might be found. Webster's defines "ethics" as the "study of standards of conduct and moral judgment," and "ethical" as "conforming to moral standards."[7] A major problem in defining "ethics" is that one can often do so only by referring to a specific code of ethics and by specifying what is and is not moral behavior. When a specific code becomes the basis for "correct" definitions, then other codes become non-ethical. But because culture and context often play an important part in determining right and wrong in a given situation, our intent

is not to establish a specific code of ethics or morals for speech communication professionals. Rather, we argue that speech educators ought to consider what might be included in ethical communication guidelines. To facilitate this discussion, we also suggest a "place" for ethics: *ethical communication demonstrates a desire for the good of all those involved in the communication process, rather than just the personal gain of the speaker or the good of the listener.* Although somewhat ambiguous, this definition allows the greatest freedom in advancing the claims of this paper. The definition's primary implication for us is that a workshop presenter must ask him/herself: "What will I gain from this experience and what will the group members gain? What must I do to insure that we all benefit from this experience?" This definition does not place personal gain against societal gain, but allows both the individual and society to benefit. It does not mandate certain components of an ethical code, but instead presents a standard that components of any ethical code must meet, and thus allows for cultural and contextual variations.

The balance of this paper will address two related issues. First, can an instructor teach ethical communication as part of the workshop, and if so, how? Although it might be only minimal, the instructor's personal awareness, enlightened behavior, and workshop focus can help mitigate the problem of ignoring ethical considerations altogether. The second issue asks, what personal ethical concerns should the instructor have? The instructor should be aware of the use to which his/her instruction might be put, and should be very conscious of what his/her own ethical code of communication entails. These issues will be analyzed by focusing on the goals and assumptions implicit in presenting a workshop, the problems created by these assumptions, and ways in which ethical guidelines (regardless of the level) might help to alleviate the problems.

The communication instructor needs to guard against being manipulated by the public perception of what constitutes "good communication practices."

Braden observes that many individuals perceive the communication course as "snake oil, a short course in tricks--short cuts to success." He concludes that "finding short cuts to problems of communication is a persistent theme in our society," ranging from the worlds of business, to education, all the way to religion.[8] Moreover, this tendency is not isolated to a small segment of our society who plead ignorance of ethical standards. A review of public perceptions suggests that communication continues to be regarded by some as a series of short cuts. A recent "On the Job" column, published in the Business section of the Los Angeles Times, told readers that through public speaking, many people "have made their reputations--and careers" by winning audience "respect, esteem, and applause."[9] A Chicago marketing executive, echoing Braden's description of snake-oil, advised potential public speakers to "try dropping a pencil or something" as an "ice-breaker," and suggested that playing with rings (jewelry) "helps me work through my nervousness."[10] Sandy Linver, an Atlanta-based speech consultant, represents one of the most successful advocates of the "speak-for-success" school. In an interview with the Washington Post, Linver decried the fact that many "speechmakers spend 90 percent of preparation on content," and relatively little time on matters of style and delivery. She argues the successful communicator emerges when the "audience feels you are talking to them," when "the words are coming from your gut." To improve speaking success, she suggests a number of tips on the proper set-up prior to speaking, voice attention, the use of pauses, proper breathing techniques, and others. The result of effective speechmaking, she concludes, is that "speaking will hurry you along the road toward recognition."[11] As these examples demonstrate, Wallace's warning has been confirmed. Nearly three decades ago, he argued, "Communication is in danger of being regarded as merely an art of personal success and of being forgotten as the indispensible art of social persuasion."[12] Clearly, the danger has not passed.

A major problem confronting the communication instructor, therefore, is how to counter the "bottom-line" mentality in America that mandates "effectiveness" as the ultimate goal of communication. One solution lies in advocating a balanced view of the ends and means of communication. "Our interest in the nature and effectiveness of the discourse process," argues Johannesen, "should not outstrip our concern for the ethical use of discourse."[13] Implementing such a balance through ethical guidelines becomes more difficult in practice. To better appreciate some of the ways in which the speech teacher may integrate ethics into a program of instruction, some of the inherent difficulties presented in the workshop situation must be recognized. Such a recognition is an important step in finding a way to solve the dilemmas of teaching effective and ethical communication skills.

Economic considerations aside, two assumptions are implicit when a short seminar is suggested or requested. These assumptions in turn give rise to two problems. In both cases, the form of the communication workshop presents significant obstacles to the teaching of communication skills. Even a lengthy course that lasts three or four hours places the instructor at a severe disadvantage. The first assumption suggests that a single authority, with little or no knowledge of group membership, can determine and teach the skills group members need to be effective communicators. The factor may lead the instructor to minimize the different needs and skills of participants and foster a generic communication seminar that treats health professionals, social workers, and businesspersons as equals with the college freshman. The instructor condensing a semester-length course into a few hours may find that the short time frame leads to overstatement and hasty generalizations. The teacher who promises to provide a thorough understanding of communication behavior in a few hours may be forced to provide a mechanical, prescriptive theory of human communication which stresses "winning" strategies at the expense of a thorough understanding.

The second assumption suggests that the material presented in the workshop enhances and improves participant skills. Selecting content for such a limited forum, however, presents difficulties. Although the instructor may make a concerted effort to focus upon ethical considerations, the emphasis on getting to the "main" aspect of the workshop--improved skills--works to minimize the presentation of ethical standards. At best, there may only be time to tell the participants that they should think about ethics; at worst, the subject is ignored. Proper discussion of communication and ethics requires time to discuss ethical perspectives and application to communication practices. Even when the instructor includes a discussion of ethics in the workshop, deciding which perspective to use is problematic. How does one discuss ethical values in a non-threatening manner? How will a group of professionals seeking communication skills react to a list of ethical guidelines? The instructor has no easy task in answering such questions, if indeed s/he even considers them. In fact, ethics are sometimes ignored in such situations simply because the subject matter resists scholarly detachment.[14]

The key difference between the classroom and the workshop, and the difference which gives rise to the problems just discussed, is that of time. In the workshop, the instructor does not have the opportunity to monitor the effects of his/her instruction. In both situations, the teacher hopes to enhance student communication skills but here the similarity ends. The classroom teacher has the time and opportunity to examine student performance and understanding through a test or speaking assignment, and work as a counter-active influence to ineffective, distasteful, or unethical practices. The c assroom teacher also employs a number of communication models, including the speeches of other students, which illustrate the practice of communication theory presented in class lectures. More important, the classroom teacher has a means

of sanctioning unethical behavior; the student who misinterprets or ignores the lesson and displays unethical behavior can be penalized by grade reduction. On the other hand, the workshop offers little occasion to test learning, and no time to modify unethical practices.

To this point, we have asked questions and discussed the problems that seem to arise in conducting a communication workshop. The final section of the paper will present some possible solutions. Returning to the first issue, can an instructor teach ethical communication as part of the seminar, and if so how should it be done? Although time constraints must be considered, we feel it is imperative that ethical communication somehow be addressed. Determining specific content needs to be addressed.

How does the instructor decide the content of the workshop in terms of ethical commuincation? Should the teacher list specific standards? Or shall the instructor challenge the students to search for their own personal code? Johannesen suggests a middle ground--that is, do not argue for acceptance of one ethical perspective. "Rather, we should survey viewpoint and criteria, discuss key issues, and probe illuminating instances so that students come to make judicious choices among ethical options in the composition process."[15] In support of this contention, he lists a variety of useful perspectives that should generate meaningful classroom discussion.[16]

As earlier mentioned, the time restrictions of the workshop combine with the audience desire to gain practical knowledge to create an atmosphere that sharply minimizes discussion opportunities. Overcoming both constraints, time and participant expectation, seems an unmanageable task. Moreover, the instructor who spends two or three minutes on each perspective in an effort to challenge participants, may be creating a counter-productive situation. Such a practice may trivialize ethical concerns by rushing through the material

leaving participants unable to understand the full implications of the perspective.

One possible method of teaching ethics requires placing ethics and communication in a broader perspective. Instead of separating ethics from the communication theory, the instructor may merge the two by suggesting that ethical communication achieves more significant goals than audience effect. Instead, ethical communication may be viewed as a means of maintaining a healthy society, of guaranteeing free speech, of enhancing political pluralism, among other societal goals. The workshop instructor need not detail a specific ethical standard as an absolute; rather, offer it as one means of achieving a larger and more significant result.

Wallace's "An Ethical Basis of Communication," offers an effective vehicle for integrating communication ethics with a broader societal benefit.[17] He equates communication with democracy--that understanding the essential values of democracy allows one to formulate an ethic of communication. By using Wallace's article, the workshop teacher can make the ends and means of communication an integral component of the larger, and generally acceptable, goal--the maintenance of democratic institutions. Wallace's four moralities, expressed as "habits," could be used to teach effective communication skills in the short seminar. For example, Wallace's "habit of search," the "art of inquiry and investigation...respect for scope and depth of fact and opinion," could be used to teach research skills, information analysis, et cetera. Or, the "habit of justice" could be included in a discussion of logical and emotional proofs, fallacies committed by speakers, and in examinations of argument construction. The "habit of preferring public to private motivations" offers a good method for examining the presentation of information and the practice of revealing sources of arguments. Wallace's last morality, "the habit of respect for dissent," ought to develop respect for "diversity of argument and opinion." Such

a habit can be tied to effective communication in the case of the speaker who reflects upon the opposing argument and gains the floor through an equitable process rather than the emotional, hostile, and immediate response that may be individually fulfilling but not very effective.

By the end of the workshop, the participants perceive ethics and communication skills as essential factors in the larger mission of maintaining democratic values. Different societal values could be expressed in terms of other ethical perspectives. Whether from a dialogical, situational, or utilitarian perspective, the communication instructor can illustrate the interdependence of ethics and communication in achieving a host of societal benefits. By grounding ethics and communication skills in a broader framework, the instructor can overcome the confines of the workshop and address the necessary values inherent in healthy communication.

The second general issue of this essay is: what personal ethical concerns should the instructor have? Of course, the most obvious is whether or not one intends to discuss ethics in the content of the workshop. Beyond that, however, are a number of other concerns, none of which may ever come to the attention of the workshop members. The Texas Speech Communication Association Ad Hoc Committee on Applied Communication recently developed a set of ten guidelines for organizational communication consultants.[18] While some of the standards clearly apply only to consulting situations, many of the guidelines merit consideration here. In order to help speech educators address ethical concerns, eight of the guidelines will be adapted to the workshop/public service seminar situation. We agree with Johannesen's analysis that professional codes serve a useful function in fostering ethical behavior.[19] Two functions seem especially relevant to the development of a code for workshop instructors. First, "codes can educate new persons in a profession" by "sensitizing them to the ethical problems" in their discipline. Second, codes may "stimulate profes-

sional and public scrutiny" of ethical practices in the field.[20] With these two goals in mind, we hope the following guidelines generate further discussion of ethical concerns inherent in the communication workshop.

The first guideline suggests that instructors "fully and honestly disclose academic qualifications" and workshop experience to workshop participants.[21] Group members deserve a full description of instructor qualifications for two reasons. First, the practice of disclosure will help protect the seminar students from the untrained or incompetent "expert" who hides his/her credentials behind a cloak of false modesty. Second, full disclosure will help protect the reputation of the speech communication discipline by clarifying who is, and who is not, an active professional with respectable credentials.

Second, the instructor "should specify services, objectives...and the products" of the seminar.[22] Participants should know the specific communication skills and information the educator hopes to provide in the workshop. More important, the instructor should determine, before the workshop, how best to adapt the content to the special needs and skills of the particular group. This guideline may help teachers set reasonable goals that can be met within the unique constraints of the seminar. This practice may reduce the pressure to rely upon generalizations and overstatements discussed earlier in the paper.

Third, the speech professional should "cite sources of any work other than their own, never claiming any work other than their own, never claiming the work of another as one's own."[23] By giving credit to others for information, theory, and research findings, the instructor enhances the credibility of the discipline by demonstrating the contributions of other scholars. Moreover, the instructor acts as a model for students by illustrating the ethical obligation of the communicator to present the sources of one's communication activity.

Fourth, the speech teacher "should act in ways consistent with his/her professional conscience, refusing to work for or supporting organizations involved in illegal or questionable activities."[24] The consequences of a professional relationship with such groups include a loss of respect among colleagues and loss of credibility among the general public. Other potential results are self-evident. On the other hand, the instructor should avoid a parochial standard in providing public service workshops. Should the teacher, for example, instruct a variety of organizations ranging from the extreme left of the political spectrum to the extreme right? The educator who perceives communication skills as a "tool" may be reluctant to provide information to a group that s/he does not favor. The teacher, however, who views his/her mission as one of developing ethical communication skills, should have few concerns about teaching diverse political organizations. Indeed, the professional may serve the public interest by showing political extremists that successful communication cannot be divorced from ethical communication.

Fifth, the workshop should be viewed "as an opportunity to focus" on the participant's needs. The seminar should not be regarded as "an opportunity... to test research questions or new programs."[25] Public service should not be used as a vehicle for increasing the available number of subjects for a communication study. In such cases, it seems the researcher/teacher has placed him/herself in a conflict of interest between the disparate needs of the participants and the necessary research design. Organizations seeking the best professional help available should be told of any underlying motivations related to research in conducting the workshop. From our perspective, public service and research should be separate aspects of a professional career.

Sixth, instructors "should reflect understanding and application of speech communication theory."[26] Seminar members should be able to understand how

research findings in communication apply to their communication practice. By avoiding jargon and technical language in adapting this material, the speech instructor is better able "to explain in a meaningful way why particular strategies are superior to others."[27]

Seventh, speech instructor's "should maintain a current, working understanding of advances in his/her areas of expertise."[28] Workshop participants, who place confidence in professional opinion, deserve the most recent research findings available. Instructors should not transmit information that has been substantially updated, refined, and changed by academic research. As the Texas SCA guidelines conclude, "Staying current in one's field of expertise is synonymous with the term 'professional.'"[29]

Eighth, the communication instructor "should request and conduct evaluations of his/her performance" in the workshop.[30] Instructors can use student feedback in assessing the effectiveness of workshop goals, determing any unaddressed issues, and obtaining suggestions for future seminars. More important, the act of requesting feedback demonstrates the willingness to seek dialogue and criticism that the speech teacher endorses in the classroom and in the community.

The communication professor comes to the workshop as an "expert" desiring to help interested members of the community. Whether or not scientists are to be held accountable for the uses to which their research is put remains unresolved, but communication instructors are attempting to apply research and thus they ought to consider how the audience members will use the knowledge provided in the workshop. By structuring the seminar in some ethical format, the teacher has a greater chance of preventing the abuse and misuse of communication skills. On the other hand, the instructor who emphasizes only the "tools" for successful communication may leave the audience believing that the ends of communication justify any available strategy. As history reveals, ends and means sometimes

become the measure of a society's justice and humanity. As such, the speech communication professional should carefully consider the enduring lessons of his/her research, teaching, and public service activity. If we do not, who will?

ENDNOTES

[1]Robert Jeffrey, "Ethics in Public Disclosure," Vital Speeches, 1 December 1973, p. 115.

[2]Richard L. Johannesen, "Issue Editor's Introduction: Questions in Human Communication," Communication, 6 (1981), 145.

[3]Waldo Braden, "The Available Means of Persuasion: What Shall We Do About the Demand for Snake Oil?" Vital Speeches, 15 June 1968, p. 539.

[4]James C. Votruba, "Faculty Rewards for University Outreach: An Integrative Approach," The Journal of Higher Education, 49 (1968), 643.

[5]Votruba, 646.

[6]Karl Wallace, "An Ethical Basis of Communication," in Ethics and Persuasion, ed. Richard L. Johannesen (New York: Random House, 1967), pp. 44-50.

[7]Webster's New World Dictionary, 1973 ed. (World Publishing Co., 1973), p. 200.

[8]Braden, p. 539.

[9]Auren Uris and Jane Bensahel, "Public Speaking Isn't Hard if You Prepare," Los Angeles Times, 17 November 1980, Sec. 4, p. 2, col. 1.

[10]"Tips on Beating Speaking Jitters," Chicago Tribune, 14 May 1981, Sec. 3, p. 2, col. 1.

[11]James T. Yenckel, "Talking Your Way to the Top," Washington Post, 18 February 1981, Sec. B, p. 5, col. 1.

[12]Wallace, p. 44.

[13]Richard L. Johannesen, Ethics in Human Communication (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Pub. Co., 1975), p. 15.

[14]Wallace (p. 44) attacks the attitude that suggests "communication is a skill, a tool, and because it is a tool we are not directly concerned with who uses it and what he says....The main business of this course is to help you be-

come an effective speaker, a successful speaker." He concludes that, "This kind of professional position, this disinterested attitude, this kind of easy reasoning, is leading many persons to look anew at the ethics of both the teacher and his student."

[15]Richard L. Johannesen, "Teaching Ethical Standards for Discourse," Journal of Education, 162 (Spring 1980), p. 5.

[16]See Johannesen, Ethics in Human Communication, for a fuller treatment of ethical perspectives that may be integrated into communication instruction.

[17]Wallace, pp. 42-56.

[18]"Guidelines for Speech Communication Consultants," presented to the Executive Council of the Texas Speech Communication Association, 29 September 1983, by the Ad Hoc Committee on Applied Communication. Members of the committee include: Paula Michal Johnson, Chair; Ray Williams; Marge Best; Bob Gratz; Judy Freeman; June Smith; and Linda Long.

[19]Johannesen, "Editor's Introduction," 149; "while admitting that lack of enforcement procedures usually lessens code effectiveness and that code wording sometimes is so abstract as to allow continuation of unethical practices, other writers nevertheless defend some useful functions for precisely worded ethical codes."

[20]Johannesen, "Editor's Introduction," 149.

[21]Texas S.C.A. Guidelines (TSCA), p. 2.

[22]TSCA, p. 2.

[23]TSCA, p. 3.

[24]ISCA, p. 3.

[25]TSCA, p. 3.

[26]TSCA, p. 4.

[27]TSCA, p. 4.

[28]TSCA, p. 4.

[29]TSCA, p. 4.

[30]TSCA, p. 4.